

# Highlights of the Chinese Neolithic objects at the Burrell Collection

*by Emma May*

The Neolithic collection within Glasgow Museums sheds light on the way of life, beliefs and artistic skills during the Neolithic period, North West China (C.2500 BC) and constitutes the beginning of what became the standard funerary practice of all succeeding society in China.

The particular strengths of this collection lie within the pottery and jade groupings. The collection comprises of a very high quality range of 46 Neolithic hand coiled funerary earthenware urns, all belonging to the earliest well defined painted pottery culture of the Gansu Yangshao Period and are typologically associated with the cultures of Banshan (c.2635-2330), and Machang (c. 2330-2055), North West China. The urns were all made to hold grain that would provide food for the dead in the afterlife, and were buried in tombs along with the dead. A Swedish archaeologist named Dr Johan Gunnar Anderson who was brought to advise the Chinese government in the 1920's formerly excavated this famous collection. He discovered the first Neolithic site in Gansu province, North West China, and went on to uncover and plot 50 Neolithic villages and burial grounds. Neilage Sharp Brown the Glasgow born shipping clerk was an enthusiastic visitor to these sites and purchased urns directly from the archaeologists and Sir William Burrell later acquired the collection through auction at Sotheby's in 1944 at which time Sir William noted 'Glasgow has the largest collection of these in Britain'. Sir William's collecting days came to an end in 1954 when he was 93. By this time he had purchased a total of 46 Neolithic earthenware's.

There is also a fine collection of Neolithic non-utilitarian jade pendants and axes that are associated with the ritualistic Hongshan and Longshan cultures situated in North East China, in present day Shandong province.

The principal types of object associated with the collection are earthenware burial urns, carved jade pendants and axes.

## **Star objects from the collection:**

- 22-4 Notched disk (xuanji) Nephrite Jade, Longshan culture c.2,500-2,000 BC
- 38-12 Neolithic earthenware with unfired mineral pigment, Yangshao Culture, Banshan type c.2500 BC
- 38-10 Neolithic earthenware two handled burial jar c.2500 BC
- 38-8 Neolithic earthenware from Yangshao Culture, used for storage in burials c.2500 BC